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TAGS: <u>PREL</u> <u>PGOV</u> <u>PTER</u> <u>PINR</u> <u>KDEM</u> <u>IZ</u>
SUBJECT: ANBAR'S AWAKENING AT TWO YEARS

Classified By: PRT Team Leader James Soriano for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

Summary

¶2. (C) The Anbar's "awakening movement" was founded in
September 2006, a date that arguably marks the turning point
in the battle against Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). It is now a
political party, the Iraq Awakening Conference (Muatammar
Sahwa Al-Iraq or MSI) and is competing with the governing
Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) for control of the Provincial
Council in future elections. However, detractors maintain
that MSI's power base, although formidable, is largely a
Ramadi phenomenon. In his public statements, MSI leader
Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha typically gives the impression that he
speaks for all of Anbar's tribes, while the foreign press
tends to identify him as the leader of "Sunni Awakening
Movement," giving a false impression that there is one
monolithic Sunni tribal movement under Ahmed's leadership.
The fact that MSI has made the transition from a
security-oriented organization during the insurgency to a
political party is one of the most singular developments in
Anbar in the past two years. End Summary.

Tribal Awakening

¶3. (U) The remarkable rise of the Iraq Awakening Conference,
or Muatammar Sahwa Al-Iraq (MSI), is perhaps the most
singular development on Anbar's political landscape in the
past two years. Its presence on the local scene promises to
give the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), which controls the
Provincial Council (PC), a run for its money at the ballot
box. It will take an election to test the two parties'
actual strength. Nonetheless, even MSI's detractors
acknowledge that the party has come a long way since its
predecessor fought to expel AQI from Ramadi.

¶4. (SBU) MSI's origin can be traced to September 15, 2006,
when Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha, a relatively obscure Ramadi
sheikh, founded the &Anbar Awakening Council8 with some two
dozen other tribal sheikhs who joined forces against AQI. By
hindsight, the Awakening's founding was the turning point in
the Battle for Anbar Province. Under Sattar's leadership,
the organization was quick to make several strategic
decisions:

-- It openly cooperated with the Coalition Forces (CF).
Sattar would refer to them as "friendly forces."

-- It encouraged Ramadi's youth to join the police force. In
the summer of 2006, police recruitment drives barely
attracted a dozen or so applicants because of AQI
intimidation. That situation changed rapidly by the fall of
that year as the Awakening's influence over local security
became more widespread.

-- With the GOI's blessing, the Awakening raised three

"emergency police battalions" for Ramadi. Although these
units were part of the Iraqi Police structure, the key point
is that the provincial government had virtually nothing to do
with forming them. Sattar made an end-run around provincial
officials to make a direct appeal to the Prime Minister for
assistance. At that time, the provincial government was too
weak to take decisive action.

Early Tensions

¶5. (SBU) Even as the Awakening made inroads against AQI, it
took aim at two of its perennial targets: the PC and the
IIP. Shortly after its founding, the Awakening openly
denounced the PC as illegitimate, absent from the scene, and
ineffective in the battle against the enemy. There was much
truth to those charges. The PC was installed after the
January 2005 election, a poll that was widely boycotted.
Only 3,775 voters cast ballots were cast in a population of
1.2 million residents. The IIP won some 2,700 votes and the
right to form the Council. It is on that shaky foundation
that the IIP's control over the PC rests to this day.

¶6. (C) The Awakening did little to conceal its contempt for
the IIP and its religious affiliation. In conversations with
PRT contacts, Sattar typically described clerQoliticians
as "frauds." He denounced the concept of the "honorable
resistance") the notion that forbids Iraqis from the
killing other Iraqis but countenances violence against the CF
) as a moral double-standard. He denounced the IIP as an
off-shoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the vehicle
that "brought the insurgents into Anbar," and a menace to

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public order.

¶7. (C) These sentiments) the visceral tribal antagonism to
a religious-based party, and the charges that the PC lacks
public consent and is ineffective) color the perceptions of
many MSI partisans today.

A New Political Equation

¶8. (C) Sattar was assassinated by a bomb planted near his
horse stable in Ramadi on September 13, 2007, a day shy of
the Awakening's first anniversary. Leadership then passed to
his older brother, Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha. In the past 12
months, Ahmed has overseen the Awakening's transition from a
security organization to a political party. The MSI appears
to be relatively well-financed, has opened offices in many
parts of Anbar (as well as outside the province), and has
been active in encouraging Anbaris to register to vote.
Indeed some 360,000 Anbaris are now registered, nearly 100
times the size of the electorate in 2005. Some analysts say
that it is likely that MSI might gain control of the PC if an
election were held today, but the party's showing would not
be a blow out given the strong IIP following in the
population centers of Ramadi and Fallujah.

¶9. (C) Ahmed has sought to broaden MSI's tribal base by
attracting technocrats into the party ranks. On this score,
MSI is playing catch-up to the IIP, as the latter is
generally an urban phenomenon and home to many Anbari
technocrats, while the MSI still has a rural and tribal
character. However, Ahmed has signaled that if MSI is to be
competitive at the polls, it must attract educated party
loyalists.

¶10. (C) Strangely, even as MSI opens to technocrats, the IIP
has a strategy of seemingly going in the opposite direction
) strengthening its ties to Anbar's tribal leaders, who are
observed in large numbers sitting in the provincial council
offices of IIP leaders. Both parties grasp that the
effectiveness in local politics) and on the national scene
- depends on a marriage of technocratic skill with a strong

tribal base.

¶11. (C) Such a combination would have a unifying effect on
the Sunni voice in national politics. The concern for
strengthening Sunni solidarity is certainly behind the IIP
overtures to Anbari sheikhs; it may also be behind some
recent talk of a possible joint IIP-MSI bloc in the next
election. That is an interesting prospect, but MSI would
need to be on guard lest it be co-opted by IIP maneuverings.

A Blurred Distinction

¶12. (C) Under Sheikh Ahmed, MSI has developed contacts with
"awakening movements" in other provinces and especially seems
to have good relations with some Shi'a tribal leaders. Many
of these awakenings, however, are independent movements with
doubtful or even no linear connection to Ahmed, although in
his public statements Sheikh Ahmed tends to blur the
distinction between MSI and a broader movement. For example,
when he visited the U.S. last year with a group of other
Anbari notables, Ahmed irked some of his traveling companions
by failing to give credit in public to other anti-Al-Qaeda
tribal movements in Anbar that were wholly not associated
with the Awakening, such as to the Abu Mahal tribe near the
Syria border town of Al-Qaim. In any case, Ahmed's
proclivity to self-promotion fits into the familiar Iraqi
mold of a tribal sheikh unilaterally speaking on behalf of
other tribal sheikhs.

¶13. (C) The foreign press also tends to blur the distinction
between Ahmed and a broader movement and at times identifies
him as the leader of "Sunni Awakening Movement" (e.g., The
Chicago Tribune, July 28). Such descriptions give the false
impression that there is one monolithic Sunni tribal movement
under AQ's leadership. IIP partisans in Ramadi are quick
to correct that misconception. In their view, MSI's power
base, although formidable, is largely a Ramadi phenomenon,
and that MSI's roster of affiliated tribal leaders tends to
be padded with the names of second-drawer sheikhs, while the
IIP courts Anbar's big tribal names.

Dissent Within the Ranks

¶14. (C) Apart from the IIP, Ahmed has detractors within MSI
ranks, and on at least one occasion expelled potential rivals
from the MSI inner circle. He has come in for criticism on
several counts:

-- Ahmed is frequently out of the country (he has business

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interests in Dubai), which creates the impression that he is
out of touch.

-- MSI hard-liners also have criticized him for sometimes
appearing to be too chummy with the IIP. Not as strident as
his late brother, Ahmed seems to have good relations with IIP
loyalists on an individual basis; it is the institutional
relationship between the two parties that sets the sparks
flying.

-- Moreover, several Anbari sheikhs who were Awakening
co-founders claim that Ahmed has sequestered a large sum of
money which ought to be shared with the Awakening leaders who
fought AQI.

Comment

¶15. (C) MSI certainly has its work cut out if it makes
pretentions to control the provincial government and to be a
player on the national scene. Ahmed's grasp on leadership is
by no means certain. MSI has a strong base in Ramadi, but
its election-day appeal elsewhere in the province has not

been tested. The organization's relations with other
"awakenings" are ambiguous, and may actually be little more
than bonds of moral affinity having scant impact on national
politics. What is remarkable, however, is that MSI has
gotten as far as it has. Two years ago its founders pledged
their honor to rid Ramadi of terrorists. For the Coalition,
they were dependable war-time allies. Today MSI has made the
transition from the insurgency to the period of post-conflict
recovery - a significant achievement in Iraq's western most
province.
CROCKER